

14 North Warren Street (Commercial Building) HABS No. NJ-958
(True American Building)
Trenton
Mercer County
New Jersey

HABS
NJ,
11-TRET,
31-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

14 North Warren Street (Commercial Building)
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Location: 14 North Warren Street, Trenton, Mercer County,
New Jersey

Last Owner: Plapinger-Platt Down Town Property

Last Occupant: Dunham's Department Store (warehouse)

Last Use: Warehouse

The True American Building at 14 North Warren Street was demolished in September 1987 to make way for new commercial construction.

Significance: The True American, a Trenton newspaper founded in 1801, was published in this building from 1893 until it went out of business in 1913. This is the only remaining building associated with the long-lived paper, and the name has been popularly connected to this structure throughout the 20th century. Following the demise of the newspaper, the building was used by the Trent Press, publisher of Trenton's City Directories for many years, and for a time, the New Jersey legislative manuals.

During the ownership of the True American, an elaborate galvanized metal facade was added to the building, updating the existing brick structure to Classical Revival taste. This is the largest and finest architectural metal facade applied to a building in Trenton, a technique which was generally limited to first floor storefronts or cornice embellishment at the turn of the century.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: ca. 1830; substantial rebuilding 1892.
2. Architect: Not Known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of Title references from Mercer County Hall of Records unless otherwise noted:
 - 1834 - Transfer by will of Ebenezer P. Rose to his wife Catherine "the house and lot" on the east side of Warren Street. (Hunterdon County Record of Wills)
 - 1855 - Transfer from the heirs of Ebenezer P. Rose to Phillip Phillips. Mercer County Deed Book 100.
 - 1879 - Transfer from the heirs of Phillip Phillips to E. Mercer Shreve. Deed book 142 page 13.
 - 1883 - Transfer from E. Mercer Shreve to Philip Dunn et al.
 - 1885 February 10 - Transfer from Thomas A. Bell and Elizabeth D. Bell, his wife; George Wood and Sarah D. his wife, and Philip Dunn Jr. to Philip P. Dunn. Deed book 168 page 553.
 - 1892 February 20 - Transfer from Elizabeth C. Dunn, widow of Philip P. Dunn, and George S. Grovesnor assignee of Philip P. Dunn to Joseph S. Naar. Deed book 181 pages 414 and 415.
 - 1902 April 30 - Transfer from Joseph L. Naar and Adelle S., his wife, to True American Publishing Company, a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 254 page 169.
 - 1908 November 9 - Transfer from Edward L. Katzenbach, receiver for the True American Publishing Company to Henry E. Alexander. Deed book 311 page 42.
 - 1911 July 27 - Transfer from Henry E. Alexander and Elizabeth K., his wife, to The Trenton True American Printing Company. Deed book 339 page 179.
 - 1913 August 8 - Transfer from John A. Montgomery, receiver for the Trenton True American Printing Company to James Kerney, trustee. Deed book 417, page 503.
 - 1919 February 27 - Transfer from James Kerney, trustee and Sarah M. Kerney his wife and Trenton Times, a New Jersey corporation, to the City of Trenton. Deed book 418 page 520.
 - 1963 June 7 - Transfer from the City of Trenton to JACL, Inc., a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 1663 page 29.
 - 1974 February 15 - Transfer from JACL, Inc. to Plapinger-Platt Down Town Property, a partnership. Deed book 1962 page 440.

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 3)

1987 September - Transfer from Plapinger-Platt Down Town
Property to DKM Properties Corp.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Turn-of-the-century metal cornice and facade probably manufactured by the Trenton Architectural Cornice Works, in business at 125-129 Front Street, Trenton in the 1890s.
5. Original plans and construction: Original plans or drawings not known to exist. Earliest view known of the building dates to about 1890, when the brick building appears in a view of North Warren Street, taken from State Street. The renovated building, with the metal facade applied, is first seen in an engraving published in the Trenton Business Directory of 1893.
6. Alterations and additions: The first floor storefront was removed and replaced with a concrete entryway to public lavatories in the 1920s. The metal cornice on the building has lost some original details, including a finial in the center of the pediment, primarily due to lack of maintenance.
8. Historical Context: This building, like those on either side of it, was originally constructed about 1830 on land subdivided from the holdings of Job Moore in 1817. At that time, the two purchasers, Ebenezer P. Rose and Richard Hunt agreed to leave a nine foot wide alley between the houses they planned to construct. Although many changes have taken place in the fabric of the buildings, the alley remains. It is still a useful service entrance to the rear areas of this and several tightly packed buildings in downtown Trenton.

Constructed as a residence, the building was soon transformed to commercial use. The earliest known tenant was Phillip S. Phillips, who operated a seed store here in the 1850s and '60s. The business expanded to include agricultural implements in the 1870s when the business was taken over by another firm, J. W. Cornell & Co. The proprietors lived over the store until well into the 1880s. With a change in managing partners, J.W. Cornell & Co. became Tomlinson & Satterthwaite in 1885, and moved to the building next door, (16 North Warren) where the agricultural implement and seed store was to prosper for another eighty years (see HABS NJ-959).

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 4)

For a few years in the late 1880s and early 1890s, the building was occupied by Dunn, Baker & Decou, shoe and boot wholesalers. But the most notable occupant of the building was the True American newspaper, which purchased and completely renovated the old building in 1892.

The True American newspaper was founded in 1801, and it chronicled the events in Trenton and the larger world for half a century with little comment from the public. In 1853, however, the paper was purchased by controversial and outspoken Judge David Naar. He was noted as a "fearless writer" by contemporaries, using his editorial prerogative to promote various causes. His political stance as a Democrat was controversial enough in the Civil War years so that in 1861, a mob visited his office and forced him to close down the paper for several months. At that time, the newspaper's offices were located on the corner of Warren and Front Streets in Trenton.

After the Civil War, the True American championed the cause of the working man during a time of rapid industrialization in Trenton. The paper gained a wide circulation and a reputation in those years for excellence in journalism, avoiding the sensationalism to which so many late 19th century newspapers were prone. The newspaper's offices moved to the corner of Broad and State Streets in 1872.

In 1885, David Naar's son Joseph took over as owner and editor of the paper, and he moved their offices yet again with the purchase of this building at 14 North Warren Street in 1892. Remodelling of the facility took place immediately, for the 1893 Trenton Business Directory includes an engraving (from a photograph) of the facade, transformed from a vernacular urban building to a handsome monument of the Renaissance Revival or Free Classic style. The renovation included application of pressed metal to the second and third floors of the facade. It featured applied columns dividing the bays, a surface imitating cut ashlar, and a projecting pediment with TRUE AMERICAN emblazoned within it. The first floor contained a shopfront with paired doors and flanking plate glass windows, as well as the opening to the alley on the south side of the building.

The True American published daily, except Sunday, and at about the time of the move to North Warren Street, employed 1 assistant editor, 1 city editor, 5 reporters, 1 pressman, 1 stereotyper, 1 assistant stereotyper, and 1 assistant mail clerk in the office. The composing room, also housed in the building, was staffed by 1 foreman, 1 assistant foreman, 1

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 -(page 5)

machinist, 1 machinists's apprentice, 1 compositor to set display advertisements, and 4 Mergenthaler machine compositors. The weekly payroll for the 20 employees amounted to \$329.50.

The Mergenthaler linotype machines installed at the True American in 1894 were the first to be used in Trenton. They were located on the second floor, according to an extensive description of the True American and its facilities published in 1897. The description also noted that the building's "handsome iron front [was] painted white, with gold ornamentation..."

The cellar was used for storage, with elevator access to the other floors of the building. The first floor was largely occupied by a stationary store, a branch of the newspaper's business. It claimed to be "one of the finest and most complete in the state, and the stock comprises the best of everything, from a tiny visiting card to ... ponderous tomes". Behind the shop was a counting room, the press room, and a boiler room. The editorial offices were in the front of the second floor, receiving light from the four large windows on the facade.

Despite the variety of businesses engaged in by Joseph Naar - selling stationary, publishing a newspaper, doing job printing of books - the enterprise began to lose money in the early 20th century. Perhaps the investment in the building, its renovations, and new equipment proved too much at once; perhaps the paper began to lose circulation and prestige because the younger Naar simply did not command the attention and respect of his father. In 1902, Naar transferred his ownership of the property to the True American Publishing Company. Six years later, the building was in receivership. The paper continued to be published, and in 1912, was given a large subsidy to support and promote Woodrow Wilson's presidential campaign. The funds did not help. The True American was last published in 1913, prior to its purchase by the Trenton Times.

The Trenton Times remains in business today as the city's leading daily newspaper, although it never published from this location. Instead, the presses and linotype machines in the building were put to use for a decade or so by the Trent Press which published the Trenton City Directories and some of the New Jersey Legislative Manuals in the 1920s and '30s.

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 6)

The building itself was purchased in 1919 by the City of Trenton, and the first floor altered for the installation of public lavatories. This was a desirable amenity in the bustling downtown business district, and the use was retained through the mid-20th century. The first floor facade and interior were greatly modified to accommodate the rest rooms; interestingly, the new exterior was designed to harmonize with the stylistic details of the metal facade applied to the upper floors a generation before. The cast concrete imitates ashlar block with deeply recessed joints, and the centerpiece of the building's exterior became the round-arched niche for a drinking fountain (since closed off).

The public comfort station was operated here until 1963. Upstairs, the Knights of Pythias Grand Lodge of New Jersey rented space from 1922 through 1925; after this date, a sporadic succession of uses - barber shop, lawyer's office, real estate office, and finally warehouse - continued until the structure was vacated in 1965. Held for speculative purposes, the building deteriorated, but the faded name of its most famous tenant, the True American, remained visible, making it a noted landmark in downtown Trenton until its demolition in 1987.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: Renaissance Revival or Free Classic in appearance, due to the classically detailed galvanized metal facade applied in 1892.
2. Condition of fabric: The structure is in poor condition inside and out with extensive damage from roof leaks and water infiltration. The lack of routine maintenance for much of the 20th century has been particularly harmful to the metal facade, which is broken, dented, and extensively rusted, particularly at the cornice and pediment.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The North Warren Street facade is 26.4' wide, adjacent to a 9' wide alley which is covered by the bulk of the building on the upper floors back from the sidewalk for a distance of 33'. The rectangular building extends into the block 171.3'. It occupies all of the property known as Block 4B, Lot 19 in downtown Trenton.

The building is three stories tall, divided into four evenly spaced bays on the upper floors of the facade.

2. Foundation: The foundation is not visible from the exterior of the building. There was no access to the basement at the time of recording.
3. Walls: The first floor has been faced with cast concrete in a light tint, resembling cut limestone. The surface is scored to resemble large blocks of dressed ashlar. The center of the first floor features a round arched niche-like opening which contained a water fountain. It is now cemented shut.

The upper floors are defined by a galvanized metal facade, applied over a common bond brick wall. The metal also imitates ashlar, with applied pilasters and classical moldings highlighting bay divisions. The middle story was recently painted, demonstrating the convincing imitation of stone that the facade must have presented when new. The side and rear walls of the building are of unpainted common bond red brick.
4. Structural systems: The building was constructed with load-bearing masonry walls. Structural strengthening, achieved by "marrying" wooden supports to either side of the joists for the second floor, was probably added in 1892 to support the heavy machinery required for the production of a newspaper. A steel beam with steel supports extending from floor to ceiling was added in the mid-20th century to support the second floor ceiling.
5. Bulkheads: The first floor storefront has been completely obliterated by later alterations. No bulkheads survive.
6. Chimneys: No chimneys survive on the exterior of the building.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways: Access to the upper floors is gained through a wooden door surmounted by a transom in the northernmost bay of the first floor. Other doors on the first floor have been closed off with cement. The opening on the south side of the building is a nine foot wide alley, faced with common bond brick, and completely roofed over by the upper floors of the building.
 - b. Windows: Upper floor windows are large 1/1 wooden sash.

8. Roof: The flat roof is hidden from view by a large galvanized metal parapet. Its broken pediment design contains an entablature with the words "True American". The pediment is flanked by consoles, and it rises above a projecting cornice with large modillion blocks.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Presently the interior is one large open space, but a row of columns running east-west through the building and a break in the floor pattern indicate that the space was once divided into two long, narrow rooms, each with a separate exterior doorway.
 - b. Second and third floors: Both upper floors are divided simply into a front and back room, each large open space used most recently as a warehouse.
2. Stairways: The stairs extend to the third floor in a straight run along the north side of the building. There is a door directly from the street as well as a doorway from within the first floor giving access to the stairs, although the latter appears to be a mid-20th century addition. The stairway is enclosed, and it is now partially covered by a modern conveyor belt. The stairway walls have a painted wainscot in a dark gray color and a wall-mounted wooden handrail.
3. Flooring: The first floor is tiled, made up largely of 1" pentagonal white tiles. Near the front entry of the building (now sealed up), the floor is covered with 3" square dark red matte-finish tiles. Upper stories are finished with diagonally laid pine flooring (4" wide) covered with 2 1/2" strip oak flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finishes: The first floor has a wainscot of rectangular (3" x 6") glazed white tile, bordered with geometric designs in black and pale grey tiles. The upper part of the wall was covered with plaster, but it has deteriorated in most places, exposing the common brick bearing wall of the structure.

The first floor is finished with a pressed metal ceiling, which covers a heavy support beam running the length of the building. The ceiling is in very poor condition.

Second and third floors are finished with deteriorating lath and plaster on the walls and ceilings. Whitewash and/or water-based paint is flaking from the walls. A wooden baseboard with a simple molded top extends around the perimeter of the room.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: There are no original doorways or doors on the first floor. A simply framed opening has been added toward the rear of the building for access into the adjacent building, 16 North Warren Street.

There are no doors on the second floor. The front room on the third floor retains three closets, each with a different door. They may all have been salvaged from earlier remodellings of the building. One door is a six-panel wooden one with raised panel exterior and flush, bead-edged paneled interior. An iron rimlock survives on the inside of this door. Another wooden door is arranged in the four-panel configuration typical of the 19th century. A third door is a late 19th century 3/3 vertical panel configuration. A fourth closet in the room has no door at all. All door frames are composed of a simple molding.

- b. Windows: The south side of the first floor was lighted by a series of eleven windows with transoms above and a door with transom above leading to the alley. The large window openings are now sealed with concrete block. On the rear south side of the building at the second floor level there are nine bays, all closed off with concrete block. The rear south side of the third floor includes nine 2/2 wooden sash windows with angled reveals. Some of these windows are presently boarded; those that are not are broken and deteriorating.

6. Decorative features: The tilework on the first floor is the only notable feature of this utilitarian interior.
7. Hardware: No original hardware identified.
8. Mechanical equipment: Iron radiators are found throughout the building, including mounted on the ceiling from chains at the rear of the first floor. The furnace was not identified in location or type.

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 10)

A row of electric light fixtures hangs from the ceiling along the north side of the first floor. The brass fixtures are suspended by chains, and have a small metal cap which presumably fit over the glass globe. No globes are extant.

The second floor is lighted by bare overhead bulbs. The wiring is encased in a metal pipe running along the center of the building.

D. Site

1. General siting and orientation: The building is sited in the middle of the east side of the block of North Warren Street between State Street and East Hanover Street. This block was known in the 20th century as the Dunham Block for a large department store which occupied much of the block. The True American Building faces westward. It is flanked on its immediate north and south by other buildings, namely 16 and 12 North Warren Street.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Not known.
- B. Early Views:
 1. Picture File - "Warren Street about 1890".
In the Trentoniana Collection of the Trenton Free Public Library.
 2. Picture File - "The True American Building" 1893.
In the Trentoniana Collection of the Trenton Free Public Library.
 3. Engraving of the True American Building, published in the Trenton Business Directory, 1893, p. 40.
- C. Interviews: None
- D. Bibliography:
 1. Primary and unpublished sources:
 - a. Real Estate Transactions, Mercer County Hall of Records, Trenton, New Jersey.

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 11)

- b. Real Estate Transactions, Hunterdon County Hall of Records, Flemington, New Jersey.
- c. Tax assessment records, Tax Office, City of Trenton.
- d. Pieringer, R.S. "Principles, Not Men: The Institutional and Professional History of the True American, 1801-1913." Unpublished senior thesis, Princeton University, no date.
- e. Richard Hunter Associates. Archaeological Investigation of the Dunham Block. Hunter Associates, Trenton, N.J., 1988.

2. Secondary and published sources:

a. Books

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b. Maps

Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey. Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1875.

Gordon, Thomas. Map of the City of Trenton and Its Vicinity. Philadelphia: J.F. and C.A. Watson, Lithographers, 1836.

Insurance Maps of Trenton, New Jersey. New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1890.

14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 12)

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c. Periodicals

"David Naar: Editor and Public Servant." Kelsey Review
2, 2 (Spring 1964): 33ff.

Lane, Sally, "Then and Now." Trenton Times. November 16,
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Lane, Sally. " True Blue and Long Out of Print."
The Trentonian, November 2, 1986.

"The True American: Sketch of Its Growth and Development
During the Century." Daily True American, June 25, 1897.

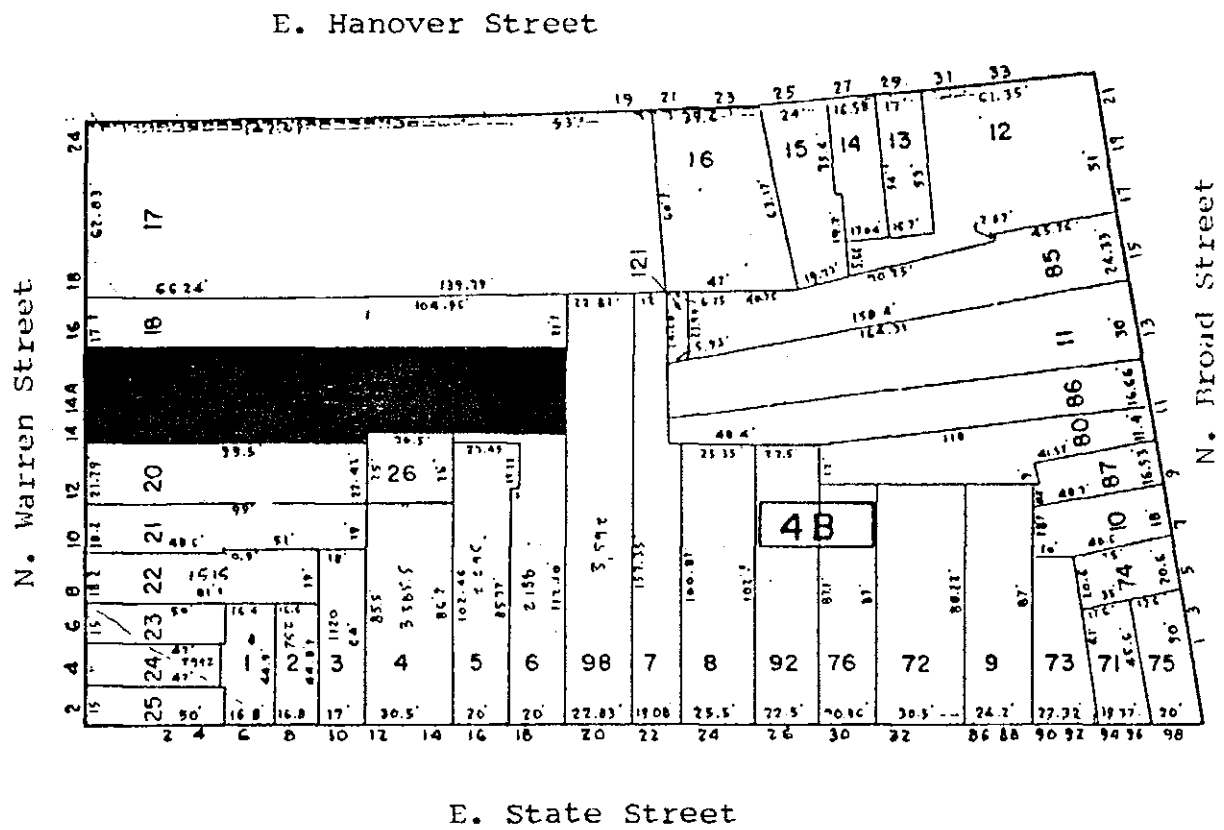
Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation for the True American Building at 14 North Warren Street was prepared for DKM Properties Corp. under an agreement with the City of Trenton, the Office of New Jersey Heritage, and DKM Properties Corp. The site was recorded to HABS standards to mitigate the loss of historic buildings, impacted by a project utilizing funds from HUD through an Urban Development Action Grant. The site is under development by DKM Properties as the Capital Center project, a mixed retail and office building containing 331,000 square feet. It is scheduled for completion in 1989.

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14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 13)

Site Plan



14 North Warren Street
(Commercial Building)
(TRUE AMERICAN BUILDING)
HABS No. NJ-958 (page 14)

Floor Plan

